But those dams along the Missouri-and we were always in competition with the Bureau of Reclamation because they were trying to take them over. What's his name? He was later Chief of Engineers [Lewis A. Pick]. They linked his name with the Missouri River Development and the Bureau of Reclamation [the Pick-Sloan Plan].

Fort Belvoir

Q: After Omaha you mentioned that you went back to Fort Belvoir to the Engineer Replacement Training Center. Did you organize the training center there?

A: Yes, I organized it. I went out there when it just started. I think we had 12 battalions as I remember, 1,000 men each.

Q: All training battalions?

A: All training battalions. We built that place across the road. We started from scratch.

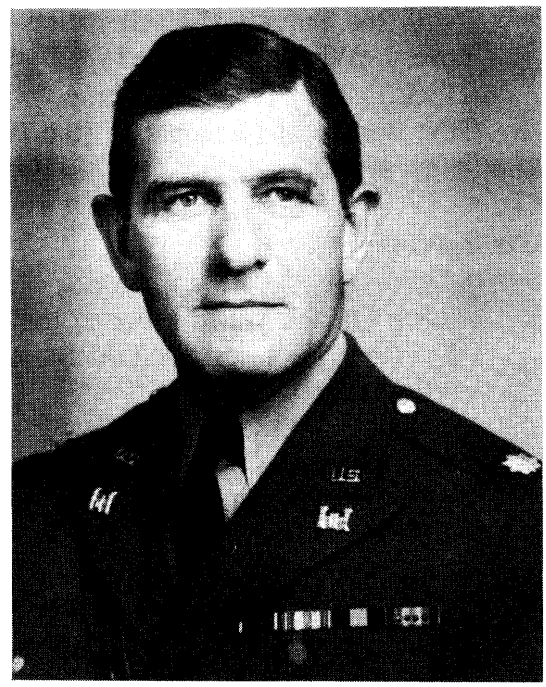
Q: At the south post?

A: Just across the road from Belvoir.

Q: Across Route 1. I keep forgetting which one's north post and which one's south post.

A: Well, that should be north, but I'm not sure. Anyway we built all that. We developed it and we had some good training. We had all sorts of classes, innovated a number of things. I don't know whether you'd be interested, but we were the first ones that started the obstacle course, which was adopted throughout the Army. They'd murder me if they ever found out I was responsible for the beginning of that. But we were having trouble getting enough exercise outside, some sort of exercise. Paul Thompson [Paul W. Thompson, USMA 1929]—1 don't know if you know Thompson or not, he was the president of the Association of Graduates—he was one of those officers that came down to Vicksburg and

lived with me for one summer. He had been to Germany to go to school and spent a year over there as an attache. Paul came back and I said, "What in the hell do the Germans do to get exercise for their men? They have much less area than we have." Well, he said they had these obstacle courses and he sort of described it. We went out and designed our own, and we built them. They weren't worth a damn, but it was a challenge. You could run through—the trouble was it wasn't enough length to it. We put in everything we could think of. We went over walls. We went over hurdles. We crossed streams on logs, a little bog or anything. We were always testing something. We went under barbed wire. We did everything else you could think of in a short space. But if you were good at it and you ran it, you could do it in about five or ten minutes at the most. We used to put the companies through there before breakfast. General Marshall came down or somebody, I'm not sure whether—I'm sure General Marshall saw it when he was Chief of Staff. But anyway they liked it. So, they sent this around all over the Army and that started the obstacle courses. I know people could murder me for that.



Lieutenant Colonel William M. Hoge, commanding officer of the Engineer Replacement Training Center, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, 1941.

Q: Only when they're running.

A: There was a lot of crawling through concrete pipes. Don't know what all. We did everything we could think of in a short space. We limited the whole business. It wasn't as big as a city block from beginning to end,

but you did all these things in a short space. You'd run, climb walls, jump over ditches, crawl through pipes, walk logs over running streams. I don't know what all we didn't try. We did everything we could which we could put in that space.

Q: The idea originally came through—

A: Through Paul Thompson. He didn't describe it to us, but he told me something about it. We got together with an officer out there on infantry training and we worked this thing out and designed this. We built two of them and they took on throughout the Army.

Q: And they're still in existence.

A: I think it was General Marshall who was very much interested in this thing. He sent it out to everybody.

Q: The training center then—was that primarily for recruit training?

A: It was all draftees. They came there right fresh from the very beginning. We had–what was it? Sixteen weeks to start with. They were changing all the time. Sometimes when the demand for troops got heavy, we'd drop down to 14 weeks and sometimes—well, generally, the standard course was 16 weeks as I remember; and then you could keep some along for specialist training, like heavy equipment operators and surveyors for maybe four more weeks.

Q: Did you start that training in November 1940, or not until later on?

A: We started in the beginning of 1940 as I remember.

Q: You arrived there November 1940.

A: It was the following year, 1941.

Q: Just at the beginning when we entered World War II.

A: No, we hadn't entered yet because it was in December of that year that we entered the war. I stayed there for a year. I don't know how many battalions we turned out. We classified men. We started the study of—what do you call it—our ability to do things.

Q: MOS [military occupational specialty] training?

A: Yes, and went on and gave them examinations. I thought it was pretty good. We had some experts from the University of Virginia or someplace to design these tests.

Q: Oh, the AFQT, the Armed Forces Qualification Test?

A: It was a question of whether you wanted carpenters or machine operators, any kind of different types. Aptitude is what we were studying, trying to sort these men out. We would get requisitions from all over the Army for certain numbers of these people.

Q: Was that the first time the qualifications testing had been done that you know of?

A: I don't know-we started it there—whether other people were doing it. We were one of the first training centers that was started-at Belvoir. That was one of the beginnings.

Q: And that was only for training Engineer troops?

A: That was only Engineers. They later started one at Leonard Wood, which became another Engineer training center.

Q: How had the basic training been conducted before? Just Army-type training?

A: Oh, it was always done in the unit.

Q: The basic recruit went right to the unit and he got his training there?

A: Or you went to a recruit depot and maybe got a little close-order drill or something like that, but that was all you got. Maybe that would be a week or two weeks; but you got your training when you were assigned to a unit and then you were put under soldiers in that unit. But we were multiplying so fast. You didn't have time to—well, you didn't have enough units. They were swamped. We ran a good training center down there. This General Moore I was talking about was the one when I got down there. I saw the encroachment of filling stations and hot dog stands and what not down [US] Highway 1, and the land prices were going up. so I went out and bought, I think it was, 10,000 acres. I'd arranged for it and I got more down there.

Q: 10,000 acres?

A: Well, we didn't have much.

Q: Oh, this was Fort Belvoir?

A: Belvoir—and it was over on the other side. We had land for almost anything you wanted. I don 't know whether you know Belvoir.

Q: Yes, sir.

A: That side of the road.

Q: It's between Route 1 and Shirley Highway.

A: Well, we started there. We bought all of that property around Woodlawn Mansion. I could have bought Woodlawn Mansion, but I was afraid of it because it was too domineering-and I didn't know what to do with it. That was the end of my project, but I bought all the land around it.

Q: That would have made a great country club.

A: I thought it was too imposing and too expensive. We built our own clubs over there. We had demolition grounds. Oh, all sorts of things. All that golf course out there we bought at that time.

Q: The big golf course is on that side.

A: We built that golf course, too. I built that later. It was later years when I went back there, but I used the heavy equipment training to work that thing out.

Q: I guess that was allowed then. Today you can't get away with that.

A: Well, we had to train-we had heavy equipment. We had schools, and you had to get someplace you could use bulldozers and use, I don't know, all kinds of things—all the equipment. There was nothing to do except turn the same pile of dirt over and over. So, we started out to smooth out some of those contours and then I got Jones, that big golfer-developer-designer.

Q: Bobby Jones?

A: Well, he isn't the great professional. There is another Jones [Robert Trent Jones] who is—was supposed to be one of the great golf course designers. Not the golf player but golf course architect, and he knew [Lawrence W.] "Biff" Jones, and he'd been up and designed-worked on the West Point design when Biff was up there in some capacity [Head Coach, Football, 1925 and 1926]. I don't know what Biff was doing, but anyway Biff had retired and was living down near Belvoir. Jones came by to see him, and he got Jones to come out and look my course over—this land which we had tentatively laid out, but it was all wrong. This professional, Jones, came out and told us what to do. I think we got a pretty good golf course. At that time we had that little golf course on the south of Highway 1, which was only nine holes and was flat as could be. It wasn't anything and all the officers at Belvoir had to go down to Quantico to play golf if they wanted to. But we built a course at Belvoir later which was as good as the Quantico course, I think.

Q: That's one of the better courses in the area.

A: We did that with soldier labor mostly, and there was the time when they broke up the funds that had been generated by the service clubs and all that after the war. They offered it to all the permanent posts in the Army. If you could present a project which would be approved, you could get some money from that. So, I presented a number of them and one of them was that golf course. I got some money from that to carry that on and to put in the water—we needed water up there on the hill and some other things. But that was a great help. Then those two field houses, we built those with soldier labor.

Q: Specter Field House and–

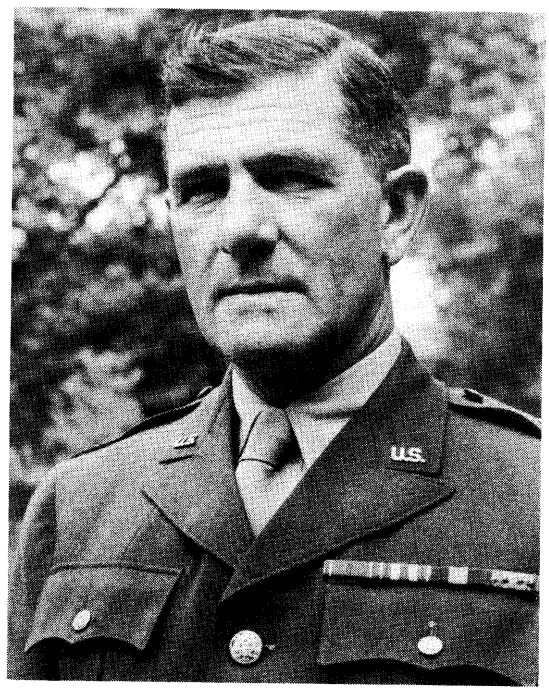
A: Well, there's two of them. You know how that came about? I got an offer at the end of the war-I was down there as commandant-of Air Force hangars that were surplus. They'd give them to you. So, I asked for four of them. I didn't know what in the hell I was going to do with them, but I got four. I decided I was going to build two field houses, one north of the road and one south of the road. We were going to put one on top of the other, one of these hangars on top of the other, and insulate them in between, put spacers so as to get something in. Try to fill them with cotton or something, wool or something for insulation. I got a bargain that somebody offered. I didn't have any floor, and somebody said I could have the dunnage off the ships that were coming back from Europe. There was a lot of dunnage in the ships, and they were going in to dry dock or dead storage, the ships were. I could have it free. So, I got a lot of dunnage. It was all oak but it was just rough stuff. And then I had to get the stuff made into floors. So, I traded-I found a mill someplace who would trade me. I think it was on the basis of 50-50. He would make me tongue and groove flooring if I gave him the rest of the lumber. So, I got enough for both field houses. We floored-and we did that with soldier labor. They're not bad field houses. We had had no indoor place. You didn't have room indoors to bat a handball around on that whole post anyplace, north or south of the road. So, we built those two. And they use them. Later they were expanded. They got some shower baths in and toilets. We didn't have that to start with. But I put one battalion north of the road and one battalion south, Engineer battalions, in competition to build these. Each one of them had a project of putting together one of these field houses.

Q: It's too bad we can't do that type of thing today.

A: Well, we did. Nobody paid too much attention.

The Alaska Highway

Q: You left Belvoir to go to Alaska then in November of 1942?



Brigadier General William M. Hoge as commanding general of the Alaska Highway Project, 1942.

A: No. I went up to Alaska first on New Year's Day of 1942. No, not New Year's Day. It was Valentine's Day. I remember I was in northern Canada on Valentine's Day of 1942. I took my first reconnaissance up there and then I came back and got my troops, some of them, ready. First I only had the—what was it? The 38th Engineers? I think it was the 38th. I'm not sure. Anyway that was the first regular regiment [35th Engineer Regiment (Combat)]. Then I got–I had some of those 400s. They were draftees entirely. Then I got a couple of Negro regiments. I had six regiments that finally came up there.

Q: About how many men in each regiment did you have?

A: There were about 2,000 men, I guess.